

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
December 4, 2024**

Present: Ms. Jenna Hardy, Vice-Chair; Ms. Laurie Rothhaus, Board Member; Mr. Ken Martin, Board Member; and Ms. Naomi Halter, Board Member.

Also Present: Mr. Everett Olsen, Chief Educational Officer; Ms. Amy Doyle, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum; and Mr. Matt Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent for Business.

Not Present: Ms. Lori Peters, Chair (Excused), and Mr. Finnegan Haddad, Student Representative.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

At 6:00 p.m., Vice-Chair Hardy called the regular meeting to order.

Vice-Chair Hardy read aloud the Merrimack School District's mission statement into the record as follows:

The Merrimack School District will provide a high-quality, future-driven education to all students in the community. Students will engage in learning opportunities that reflect both rigor and relevance and meet their cognitive, social, and emotional needs. The district will prepare students to understand, adapt, and adjust to civic, economic, social, and technological changes in the world. Our overall goal is to inspire, create, and encourage students to be curious, connected, prepared, resilient, and dedicated individuals who are lifelong expert learners. Merrimack graduates exercise judgment; they are innovative and will become responsible contributors to society. We hope the discussions we have tonight will always align with that mission.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was none.

3. BUDGET QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

a. Food Service

Mr. Dave Dziki, Director of Food Services, was present to present the proposed budget for the Food Services Department.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell commented that the Food Services Fund was a special revenue fund, which meant that all of the income that it received offset the expenditures that it made. He said there was no impact on the tax rate for the Food Services Department. He added that Mr. Dziki currently had a surplus that would pay for the proposed items he was requesting.

Mr. Dziki stated that the proposed item in his budget was the replacement of the current van, which was nine years old.

Question: Vice-Chair Hardy asked a question pertaining to self-funding.

Answer: Mr. Dziki replied that his requests were self-funded. He added that the Department of Education and the Bureau of Nutrition allowed him to carry three months' worth of expenditures, and as there was a surplus, it was a good time to spend it down.

Mr. Dziki stated that he lowered the line item for vehicle repairs because if a new vehicle were purchased, that line item would be for oil changes and minor maintenance.

Question: Chair Peters asked how many miles were on the van.

Answer: Mr. Dziki replied there were 65,300 miles on it. He added that the brakes and tires had been recently repaired.

Question: Board Member Halter asked a question regarding the \$10,000 decrease in food service supplies.

Answer: Mr. Dziki replied that he felt they may have over-budgeted for supplies after coming out of the pandemic, but they were currently more aligned. He added that they belonged to the New Hampshire Buy-In group, which did the bidding for the Merrimack School District.

Mr. Dziki said the warming ovens at the high school were old and in need of replacement.

Mr. Dziki commented that the Food Services Department served between 1,400 and 2,000 meals per day; there were 9.5% to 10% of students who received free & reduced and always encouraged parents to submit applications for free & reduced lunches.

Mr. Dziki said there was a line item for contracted services because they needed the extra help.

Question: Board Member Rothhaus asked if it was possible to put money in the Capital Improvement Plan for needed equipment in the Food Services Department.

Answer: Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that they had been using the surplus but added that a capital reserve account could be created for anything. He said, however, that if a capital reserve account were created, it would raise the tax rate, and using the surplus would not.

Question: Board Member Rothhaus asked what the state average was for students who had free & reduced lunches.

Answer: Mr. Dziki replied he was not sure what the state average was, but he would find out.

b. K-6 Elementary Schools (MES, RFS, TFS, JMUES)

The following were present to represent their respective budgets:

- Ms. Bonnie Painchaud, Principal of Reeds Ferry Elementary School
- Ms. Amy Gentile, Assistant Principal, Reeds Ferry Elementary School
- Ms. Julie DeLuca, Principal, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School
- Ms. Brooke Ross, Assistant Principal, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School

- Dr. Nicole Rheault, Principal, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School
- Ms. Meg Fowler, Assistant Principal, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School

- Ms. Michelle Romein, Principal, James Mastricola Elementary School
- Ms. Kathleen Ortega, Assistant Principal, James Mastricola Elementary School

Question: Chair Peters asked what the percentage of the ELA curriculum expenses were for recurring consumables.

Answer: Ms. Painchaud replied that approximately 40% was for supply and text expenses.

Question: Chair Peters asked about some of the changes regarding co-curriculars. She also asked if there was any consideration given to seeking qualified volunteers for co-curriculars instead of paying stipends and only having faculty and staff run them.

Answer: Ms. Painchaud replied that there were multiple opportunities for volunteers in the district. She said, however, that they currently used staff members, and the elementary schools had a variety of clubs and co-curricular activities.

Question: Vice-Chair Hardy asked to explain why the Reeds Ferry Elementary School needed an additional school counselor when the other elementary schools did not have one.

Answer: Ms. Painchaud replied that as of the current 2024 – 2025 school year, they had surpassed over 500 students, with enrollment projected to be 525 or above for the 2025 – 2026 school year. She said the American School Counselor Association recommended a counselor-to-student ratio of one counselor to every 250 students.

Question: Vice-Chair Hardy asked why there was no new funding needed for the furniture to furnish a new classroom and the furniture/rug replacement at the James Mastricola Elementary School.

Answer: Ms. Romein replied that there was money allotted for the furniture, but there was no increase in the budget.

Question: Can you please explain to the community why there is \$1,400 budgeted for two police officers for four schoolwide events

Answer: Ms. Deluca replied that they had traditionally had one police officer at schoolwide events, and that officer helped navigate traffic. She said that due to the large turnout, families had to park at Veterans Park and that they needed another police officer to help them cross Camp Sargeant Road. She said they paid each officer \$375.00 for their service.

Question: Board Member Martin asked to please explain the reason for shifting the library budget over to be part of the individual school budget as opposed to part of the technology budget.

Answer: Ms. Painchaud replied that the district had recently implemented a structural change by moving the library budget from the district-level technology budget line to the individual school budgets. She said the decision had been made to better align library resources with the specific needs of each school, leveraging the expertise of the librarians. She said the change ensured that libraries received dedicated funding and better identified the needs at each school.

Question: Board Member Halter asked what the difference was between the District-Wide Elementary Unit 10 and the units for the individual schools.

Answer: Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained that the unit numbers were used to identify individual schools. He also explained that they also used general units in the 10's, 20's, and 30's.

Question: Board Member Halter asked what the increase in the Administrative Assistant for Guidance at the Reeds Ferry Elementary School was for.

Answer: Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that the Administrative Assistant position was a new position that needed help with coordinating the 504 plans. He added the cost would be \$30,000.

Board Member Halter explained that the increase in the Mystery Science line item was that the number for renewing Mystery Science was just the increase over the prior year.

Question: Board Member Halter asked which technology accounts the various library accounts moved from and what the reasoning for the change was.

Answer: Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied he would provide the School Board with a spreadsheet for clarification.

Question: Board Member Vice-Chair Hardy asked what the difference between English Language Arts and Reading was. What items are covered by each account?

Answer: Ms. Romein replied that the reading accounts, both texts and supplies, are used for the reading program and curriculum associated with reading and, currently, with Wit & Wisdom, some of that is reading since both reading and writing were addressed in the Wit & Wisdom program. She further explained that the ELA (English Language Arts) accounts related to text and supplies were typically used for other areas of literacy, such as phonics instruction, vocabulary, spelling, and handwriting.

Question: Board Member Halter asked why the reading/text/new account had gone to zero.

Answer: Ms. Painchaud replied that it was due to the initial purchase of all of the new programs, including Foundations, and Wit & Wisdom.

Ms. Painchaud commented that some new furniture had to be purchased to replace broken chairs/tables. She also said the district hired two new Physical Education teachers and purchased partitions to separate the gym into two. However, she pointed out that overall, the furniture line had decreased, and they were maximizing what they already had.

Question: Board Member Halter asked if there were any different associations that the principals and assistant principals belonged to or if they were the same as the current year.

Answer: Ms. Painchaud replied the associations were all the same as in previous years. She said they were members of the Association for Supervision, Curriculum, & Development and the New Hampshire Association for School Principals. She said as part of the New Hampshire Association for School Principals, they were also a member of the National Association of School Principals.

Question: Board Member Halter asked about the field trips that were offered.

Answer: Ms. Painchaud replied that there were two new field trips: one was for the fourth-grade students who would visit the Andres Institute of Art in Brookline, NH. She also said they wanted to budget for a field trip to the One Room Schoolhouse in Merrimack for the fourth-grade students. She said all of the field trip experiences were intended to enhance both the science and social studies curriculum.

Question: Board Member Halter asked how they budgeted for classroom supplies.

Answer: Ms. Painchaud replied that it was based on projected enrollment for each school.

Question: Board Member Halter asked what the increase in music supplies would fund.

Answer: Ms. Romein replied that the need for music supplies had decreased based on lower enrollment projections; however, she noted that they did have a higher music replacement budget line to purchase a keyboard to support the Music Program.

Board Member Rothhaus requested the data at the end of the year for the co-curricular activity, including new programs, the number of students participating, and how the programs were going in general. Ms. Painchaud replied that she would supply that information to the Board at a future date.

Dr. Rheault clarified the percentage of ELA (English Language Arts) Curriculum expenses and reoccurring consumables. She said the total at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School, between the supply line and text line, was approximately \$16,600. She said \$13,500 went toward the Spelling Connections program. She added that the other items purchased out of the supply account were Scripts National Spelling Bee materials, binders, post-it notes, and the digital license for the Zaner Bloser spelling program was \$576.00 per year.

Dr. Rheault also said that James Mastricola Upper Elementary School would be working with Mr. Harley Hall at the high school regarding co-curricular programs. She said they would work with students who were taking advanced courses in Spanish and French and would hold a Spanish and French Club, which a teacher would supervise.

Dr. Rheault stated that another new opportunity was the "Great American Citizen Challenge," which would provide students with a more in-depth dive into the history of the United States.

Question: Vice-Chair Hardy asked about the job description for the Math Coordinator.

Answer: Dr. Rheault replied that the Math Coordinator position was described as being an Interventionist, and that was the heart of the work that the individual would do. She said 80% of the work in the position would involve working with the students every day. She also said she would like the individual to do some work to understand the data and teach staff about possible gaps.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that this was a position that they had to cut from the proposed budget the previous year, and it had been a painful decision to make. She added that she was very pleased to see it on the current proposed budget.

Question: Board Member Martin asked why they were requesting more for next year when 2/3rds were not spent the previous year.

Answer: Dr. Rheault replied that the Mystery Science program was a fantastic program at the lower elementary schools, and the previous year, the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School had purchased the OpenSciEd program. She said this year, they wanted to take the students to the Museum of Science in Boston, MA, and to the Christa McAuliffe Planetarium in Concord, NH. She added that it was going to cost more money to have off-campus field trips.

Question: Board Member Halter asked if the field trip to the Strawberry Banke had replaced the Lexington and Concord trip, and if so, what was the reasoning.

Answer: Dr. Rheault replied that it did replace the Lexington and Concord trip because the Strawberry Banke reflected colonialism in the 1600s, and Lexington and Concord were at the beginning of the Revolutionary War in 1775. She added that the social studies curriculum had been refined and was focused on the Revolutionary War at a different time.

Question: Board Member Halter asked why the supplies for science decreased by \$4,000.

Answer: Dr. Rheault replied they had been fortunate in that they had the money the prior year for OpenSciEd, the kits came for 100 students, and each science pod had 50 students. She said they had what they needed, although they would have to revisit funding in the future.

Question: Board Member Halter asked what the status of the cafeteria tables at James Mastricola Upper Elementary School was.

Answer: Dr. Rheault replied that they had great luck with having six lunch periods as there were fewer students in each lunch period. She further said that they had enough seating for the time being.

Question: Board Member Halter asked how old and in what condition the art rack that was being replaced was and how long the new one was expected to last.

Answer: Dr. Rheault explained that art racks were very costly, but the reason they were asking for a new one was that the one they had was very old and did not work correctly.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented that if the district did not need the money being requested, they would not be asking for it. He added that the staff made cuts where necessary.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. November 18, 2024 Public & Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Mr. Martin made a motion to approve the public and non-public minutes from the November 18, 2024, meeting, as amended. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

Edit:

Line 75: "Enswoth Plus" was changed to "aimsWeb Plus" – (Asst. Sup. of Curriculum Doyle)

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Joanne Grobecker, 27 Craig Drive, addressed the Board and said it was amazing to her that she did not have to ask the district to invest in literacy. She thanked the administration and the staff for their dedicated, hard work in achieving the milestone.

6. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:39 p.m., Board Member Halter made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.